

Accuracy, Comprehension and Fluency

You've probably heard your child talking about "just right books." These are books that provide just enough challenge so that students can try out new reading strategies, but are not too difficult. Research tells us that students learn most when they are reading "just right books." There are three main factors in determining if a book is just right - accuracy, comprehension and fluency.

When teachers talk about accuracy, we are talking about the percent of words read correctly. For students reading at levels A-K, 90-94% is a good instructional range. For students reading at levels L or higher, 95-97% is a good instructional range. When students make too many errors, it is hard for them to understand the author's message. If the book is too easy, then students do not have the opportunity to practice newly learned skills.

While accuracy is important, students need to understand the story or information being read. Teachers work with students on comprehension using strategies that match the student's reading level. Beginning readers often retell a story or name interesting facts shared by the book's author. As books become more complex, students are asked to make predictions, make connections based on prior knowledge or infer meaning. Students are also asked to think critically about the author's writing by noticing the way a book is organized. Students also learn to use things like a glossary, sidebar, diagram or caption to increase comprehension.

Fluency, the way a student interprets the book through their voice, is strongly connected to comprehension. When thinking about fluency, teachers consider how fast or slow a student reads and whether students pause at punctuation marks. Students learn to use expression and phrasing to guide meaning. It is natural for readers to slow down occasionally to work out tricky words and then speed up again when the text is easy. As beginning readers increase the number of words they can read automatically, fluency improves. More advanced readers who are quickly able to apply word solving skills also benefit from strong fluency.

As summer draws near, please encourage your child to continue to read "just right" books on a regular basis. Classroom teachers and the Ann Arbor Public Library can provide you with a list of books.